

INTRODUCTION

Literature review on media discussing how web sites should be displayed and how not, to cater for the user and challenges what designers think users want look for but actually do.

Reading materials for this review are

- Don't Make Me Think 2nd Edition – Steve Krug. (2005)
- The Art & Science of Web Design – Jeff Veen. (1999)

The World Wide Web, the users and the designers it would seem are two very different factions, the designer who makes their site in a way they want you to view it and the user who wants to view the site their own way. Now whose approach is the correct one? Well, that is something ill be discussing within this review.

As a user come designer myself I have seen this from both angles, now you might think, well of course all designers browse the internet as well, and yes all agree they do, but in a world where singularly your fighting against millions to get users attention you can very easily become distracted by the notion to make a site eye catching instead of user friendly.

Both Steve Krug & Jeff Veen discuss this point in great lengths in their books and draw a lot of great conclusions, particularly Steve Krug in his book “Don't Make Me Think” which mentions

“One of the very few well-documented facts about Web use is that people tend to spend very little time reading most Web pages. Instead, we scan (or skim) them, looking for words or phrases that catch our eye.”

Steve Krug, Don't Make Me Think (2005)

And it is so true, when you go to a site more often than not your only there for a single or few items of information at a time, in your head you know what your looking for, keywords that would encapsulate them, thus when faced with a page at full width with lots of information, lets say a newspaper web site, your easily scanning that page looking for those key words in your head, bypassing a tonne of information rendering it useless in that instance for that specific user.

So as Steve Krug mentions again;

“When we're designing pages, we tend to assume that users will scan the page, consider all of the available options, and choose the best one.

In reality, though, most of the time we don't choose the best option, we choose the first reasonable option, a strategy known as “satisficing”. As soon as we find a link that seems like it might lead to what we're looking for, there's a very good chance that we'll click it.”

Steve Krug, Dint Make Me Think (2005)

Of course the information not viewed isn't dead; user to user we all differ in what we require when browsing any website, it's just, as a designer, we have to make sure that what I make/design is relevant to the user and also makes their experience easy.

Now from a user point of view I know that, for myself, I hate it when a website overloads you with information, all squished into a limited space making the experience difficult when trying to find what you're looking for, I need to know where am I? What's here? Where can I go?

The internet is a medium that encourages a quick pace, with trillions of websites about and so little time to view a small section of them, users just don't want to think! Give them the information they require nice and simply, this application of methods does breathe life into the chance of said user(s) bookmarking your site and then using you for the foreseeable future, single handily bypassing the competition.

“If we find something that works, we stick to it. Once we find something that works—no matter how badly—we tend not to look for a better way. We’ll use a better way if we stumble across one, but we seldom look for one.”

Steve Krug, Don't Make Me Think (2005)

If we look at what Jeff Veen has to say about this type of topic, you get a slightly different angle on designing for the user. Veen frequently talks about the need for structure and how if a site is built correctly, the structure can also aid the users experience and ease of use.

Take for example www.bbc.co.uk one of the great parts to this site is that, even due to its sometimes infinite wealth of information and sub sections, if you roughly know the topic your looking up, you can add that name as a folder type to the end of the address

- www.bbc.co.uk/football/

Adding an extension like /football/ will direct the user to the correct section within the domain; this overcomes what Steve Krug talks about as “satisficing” a term first coined by Herbert Simon within *Models of Man: Social and Rational* (Wiley, 1957). A user doesn't have to trawl through the mass of content that is www.bbc.co.uk but can “hotlink” directly into the section they desire, a good piece of user friendly technology.

One thing I don't agree on, that both authors expand into, is that all websites should cater for the laymen, that it's unfair to design a site that would put people off the chance use it, now in principle I do actually agree, but where I don't is within the fact that, some sites are intended for a specific audience and that audience could be one of users with a good knowledge of the internet, computers or technology and find it easier than some to get past design that can at times challenge the user into ease of use.

If you're a world wide corporation that's very famous then, yes, Veen & Krug's theories come into play every time. It is paramount that global sites aimed at the masses adhere to web standards.

Although the books are both a few years old (one more than another) they still have a lot of principles that are required within today's design for the web and go a long way into helping new comers to the industry to find their feet within the web standards fraternity, saying this though does spark some thought on my part towards the admission of standards ideas, towards database driven sites using the likes of PHP & Ajax, both being up to date codes that help give a more interactive aspect to the users experience, something web designers call Dynamic design, static design (web sites using the likes of basic flash and HTML) seem to stumble upon the inability to offer a user an extra experience that could, in line with web standards keep users coming to your site over the competitors.

SUMMARY

After reading these two books, I feel I'm on the right path towards successful standards coding and design with the sites I create; now it's easy to know the fundamentals of this ideal but harder to convey them into a working public site, as with all media; from thought to fruition, ability can be lost along the way, but with every site and book/text I read I can progress towards better self standards, which, in turn, will only help the users browsing my work to have a better experience.

Information Architecture incorporating web standards for users is the key and future to next generation web design and the more designers that apply this concept the better the WWW will be for everyone.

Web Design Degree

Student Number: WRI06102817

Semester 1

Contextual Practice - WEB1001

Literature Review

1st Submission

Handed In: 6/05/2008